

*Acclaimed British actor Anthony Hopkins, who is currently mesmerising audiences with his chilling portrayal of a serial killer in *The Silence Of The Lambs* and will turn up later this year in the gentle Australian film *Spotswood*, has a secret ambition - to ride off into the sunset playing a Mad Max-type of role.*

While Welsh actor Anthony Hopkins has often been hailed as one of the greatest of his generation, he takes a far more modest approach. He chooses not to intellectualise a part or undertake intense research like a lot of his American counterparts in particular.

He sees himself as an instinctive actor who builds up a picture of a character in his mind and then plays it based on the script. Yet there's no such thing as a typical Hopkins performance. All you have to do is look at his two latest films - *The Silence Of The Lambs*, just released, and the forthcoming *Spotswood* - to realise that despite his modesty, Hopkins is a chameleon amongst actors, and no two performances, be they on stage or screen, are identical.

Over the years he has meticulously developed his craft and admits to enjoying the profession more now than he used to. "I do enjoy acting enormously," he explained by telephone from his London home. "I don't understand it and I always used to feel guilty about it, thinking: what a useless way to make a living. I'm still taken by surprise, because it IS the oddest way to make a living, dressing up and pretending to be other people."

Hopkins justifies his career because of what it has done for him. "It has, in many respects in hindsight, been a very positive, powerful form of therapy, because I've been able to live out these different lives of people." Today, however, he's more relaxed and less philosophical about it all. "Now I enjoy acting more than I've ever done." Why now as opposed to earlier in his career? "Because it's got easier and I've

simplified it. I know now that I can do it, that I'm good at it, which I know out of experience, technique and knowledge. I'm also fascinated by the process although I don't quite understand it. I've simplified it to such a degree that I just learn the lines, show up and not do anything else. I used to agonise over it and analyse it. Now I learn the lines working very quietly on my own and I like to shape them and then sculpt the part in my mind."

In *The Silence Of The Lambs*, for example, in which Hopkins is hypnotic as a highly intellectual but barbaric serial killer, whose help is enlisted by an FBI agent to track down another such killer, the actor didn't do any research or preparatory work for the role; it all came from the script and his quiet approach to learning the lines. "With Lector in *Silence Of The Lambs*, I could see his image as I was learning it. He grew very clearly and I could see him very vividly, almost in three dimensional form, in my mind. So all I had to do then was use my mimicry and put on the mask of the part.

"It's like putting a veil on your face and you become it. Then everything starts to change and you become the character. I like to step into it. I belong to a school of acting which is very cold and technical, which is the only way to approach acting. Once you've got all of that sorted out, all your intuitive impulses take over."

Strange as it seems, Hopkins came across acting by accident. Brought up in a working class Welsh family, he stumbled across acting, first by discovering a talent for mimicry at a young age, and later because he had nothing else to go to. "I never knew I was going to become an actor. I

The Villain in Lamb's Clothing

*An interview with Anthony Hopkins
by Paul Fischer*

became one out of a sort of mild desperation, because I had no other qualifications and no future."

Hopkins began his career in the theatre before making his film debut in the 1968 classic *The Lion In Winter*, in which he starred opposite Peter O'Toole and Katherine Hepburn. "I enjoyed doing that film, especially working with those two and I couldn't believe my luck."

Despite his success in the theatre, something which has won him enormous respect, I was personally surprised to learn that it was always film that had held a fascination for him and not theatre. "I always wanted to do film; that's all I ever craved to do. I wanted to see what I looked like and had a shock when I first saw myself. I had this deep yearning to do film, but being the Philistine that I am, I just wanted to be famous. I had no artistic pretensions; I just wanted to be a movie star."

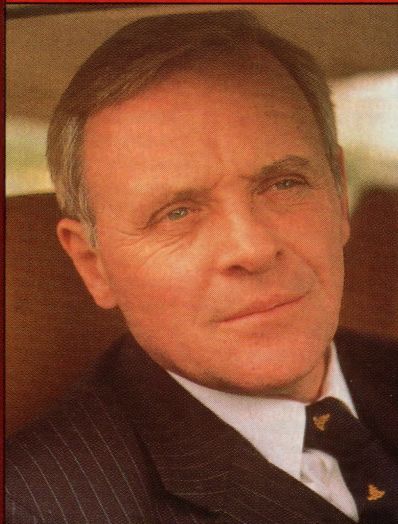
Hopkins bluntly admits that he spent so much time in live theatre because it was the stepping stone towards film. "I'm very choosy in what I do," commented Hopkins. "I don't want to go back to the theatre and do some old warhorse of a part in some classic just because it's a classic, because it's boring and I don't want to bore people." Yet there was a time when Anthony was not so choosy, back in his Hollywood heyday.

"I was not looking for anything in particular and I did some pretty shocking things like *Hollywood Wives* which I did out of a kind of 'f-k you' attitude: I'm going to do what I want to do. I never regretted it; I wanted to do it for the fun and I like to do that. I do a lot of rubbish now and then for fun. I hate to be stuck with the respectable actor image, because it smacks of tights, deep onerous voices and constipation."

"I'd like to do an action film which would demand something of me very physically. When it comes down to it, I would really like to be Mel Gibson," he says laughingly. "I'm really attracted to things that keep my interest going and allow me to enjoy myself."

The Silence Of The Lambs certainly met that criteria and Hopkins was surprised when the role ended up as his. "After living in Hollywood for some years, I thought that was a nice phase in my life and enjoyable while it lasted, and now I'd better get on with my life in London. A few days later, I got this fantastic offer to play Hannibal Lector and I couldn't quite believe it and I thought they were kidding. I wanted to make sure that it was in fact my part, and sure enough, it was." As mentioned earlier, he drew on nothing to play that role, "but I rather let it draw on me. I just knew how to play it; it's one of those weird things."

"Alwyn Kurts is wonderful. I think he steals the film. In fact I was so jealous of him, that I suggested to Mark that he cut most of him out. From now on I have one rule: never to work with animals, children or Alwyn Kurts."



Despite the character's apparent complexity, Hopkins scoffs at the suggestion that it was a difficult role for him to play. "It was dead easy, but then any part is easy if you make it. It's a question of how much you want to complicate things. This part was a LITTLE more difficult, but if you get a really well-written part and you approach it in a relaxed and intelligent way, it's easy. It's only difficult if you decide to make it so."

In the past, Hopkins had a reputation of fighting with directors - "I couldn't stand the bullshit in my younger days" - but now he has

mellowed considerably. In fact he has nothing but praise for *Silence's* Jonathan Demme. "He's one of the best directors I've ever worked with. He's very democratic and enthusiastic and tremendously understanding of everyone on the set. He's not a shouter or screamer and if someone suggested an idea, he'd take it and give credit where it's due. He's also a very strong director and he has got his mind very set on what he wants to do."

The film has been a huge success in the US, a fact that comes as no surprise to Hopkins. "Audiences like to be filled with things and they want to be entertained. That's what *Silence Of The Lambs* is: pure entertainment."

Spotswood, on the other hand, presents the actor in a much softer light. Shot in Melbourne, this gentle comedy sees the actor cast as a time and motion expert sent to recover the fortunes of a flagging shoe company. Co-starring Ben Mendelsohn, Rebecca Rigg and veteran Alwyn Kurts, the film has already been sold to the US.

Hopkins agreed to do the film for one simple reason: "I just wanted to come to Australia. It was a nice script so I thought I'd go and do it. I love travelling." As in every thing else he does, his preparation for the role was non-existent. "I just learnt the lines and did it. You read the script and it's a very simple part, in that the character starts off as one thing and then ends up as the other, growing and changing throughout. Mark Joffe the director was very good on that. He said 'Don't do anything. Just be yourself'. And I said 'OK'. He just wanted to keep it all very simple. So we just spoke the lines, which is what film acting is all about."

Hopkins has fond memories of working with his Australian co-stars, in particular Alwyn Kurts, formerly of *Homicide* fame. "Alwyn is wonderful. I think he steals the film. In fact I was so jealous of him, that I suggested to Mark that he cut most of him out. From now on I have one rule: never to work with animals, children or Alwyn Kurts."

Being very unphilosophical about his profession, he has little in the way of unfulfilled ambitions. "I want to be like Clint Eastwood, riding off into the sunset," Hopkins muses. But more important for the actor, who is tipped to win an Oscar next year for *Silence Of The Lambs*, "I just want to be as good as my last job." Having seen him give two incomparable performances of late, what comes next will be hard to beat.

***The Silence Of The Lambs* has just opened in cinemas nationally. *Spotswood* is due to be released in November.**

